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ABSTRACT

Oklahomans are looking to their colleges and universities as avenues through which the diversification of the state's economy and economic salvation can come about. The challenge to higher education is identifying qualified students, and identifying their teachers who can assist them in making wise choices in planning their college careers. The Academic Bowl, an integral part of Oklahoma State University's public effort to encourage excellence in Oklahoma's secondary schools, has fostered an awareness of Oklahoma higher education and attracted a teacher cadre of exceptional talent and ability. A survey of 26 Academic Bowl teacher/coaches found that they have continuing opportunities for having long-term influence on their students--extremely capable students who generally leave the state to attend college or after college graduation. Statistics show the teaching areas of Academic Bowl teacher/coaches and number of years taught in school. Statistics also show the choice of college and choice of majors of Academic Bowl graduating seniors. (JDD)

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Higher Education and The Honor Student: Attracting the Best

During the last half-decade Oklahoma has experienced several major economic and social dislocations that have impacted its citizens. Of major note has been international collapse of oil and natural gas prices. This, in tandem with a rapid decrease in farm income, has forced many within the state to relocate or redefine their livelihood. The dramatic increase in corporate and personal bankruptcies including various segment of the state's banking industry, are visible and well understood illustrations of the problem.

As a consequence, Oklahomans are beginning to view their colleges and universities as hopeful avenues through which the diversification of the state's economy and their own economic salvation can come about. Unfortunately, the state's higher education system has found it difficult to attract and retain qualified high school students because of its inability to give them "star billing" in the same manner as their football and basketball players.

Yet, to assume that Oklahoma colleges and universities are unable to attract quality students is not correct. Historically, the convening power of Oklahoma higher education can be seen by its accessibility, comprehensive status, and traditional concern for students and faculty. The challenge to higher education is identifying qualified students and their teachers who can assist them in making wise choices in planning their college careers.

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A HISTORY

The Academic Bowl , an activity begun in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, was started in 1984. During the following year it became an integral part of the College's public effort in encouraging excellence in Oklahoma's secondary schools. Beginning with 16 schools, and at present hosting 32, it became obvious that an intrinsic benefit of the Bowl was its ability to foster, within Oklahoma students, an awareness of Oklahoma higher education. Further, and most noticeable, the Bowl attracted a teacher cadre of exceptional talent and ability. These role models have proven significant in encouraging their young charges in pursuing a college education. Beginning in 1989, in conjunction with Texaco and Cox Cable, the Academic Bowl was televised to literally thousands of homes throughout the state.

THE ACADEMIC BOWL - THE IMPACT

The impact of the Academic Bowl can be seen though a recent study of the students and teacher/coaches. While it is assumed that the students will be extremely capable, it was noted through study that the vast majority of students leave the state. Further, it was noted that the teachers, like football coaches, have a great impact on the lives of the students. It was also noted that the students and teachers reacted in a positive manner when confronted with professors and other higher education representatives in formal and informal surroundings. As a consequence, the long-term impact of the Academic Bowl has established meaningful linkages between secondary schools and higher education institutions on a grassroots level.

TEACHER/COACHES

Of the 26 coaches who responded to a recent survey, 16 identified themselves as female and 10 as male. They represent subjects and areas that traditionally attract the upper quartile of secondary school students. Table

One is an overview of the teaching and professional areas of the academic teacher/coach.

TABLE ONE
TEACHING AREAS OF ACADEMIC BOWL TEACHER/COACHES

Math/Science/Computers	09
Gifted	06
Advanced Placement English	04
Advanced Placement History	03
Foreign Language	01
Counselor	02
Librarian	01
TOTAL	26

The teacher/coaches are unique in that they show themselves to be a professionally stable population. Remaining in teaching for long periods of time, they have continuing opportunities for having long-term influence on their students. For example, Table Two shows that the typical Academic Bowl teacher/coach has been in the classroom for 17 years.

TABLE TWO
TOTAL NUMBER OF YEARS TAUGHT IN SCHOOL

Greatest number of years taught	27
Shortest number of years taught	03
Mean	17.17
Medium	20
Mode	20

The stability of the teacher/coaches is further indicated by their tenure at their present school. Table Three reports "job satisfaction." The mean number of years (12.7) represented by this group is greater than the traditional teacher in Oklahoma. They are obviously faculty leaders.

TABLE THREE
TOTAL NUMBER OF YEARS TAUGHT AT PRESENT SCHOOL

Greatest number of years	22
Shortest number of years	03
Mean	12.7
Medium	13
Mode	21

In recognition of this, 15 of the teacher/coaches responding indicated that their school boards paid them "overtime" to manage the Academic Bowl programs. Because of the length of service these teachers represent, the extra pay obviously is not the prime purpose of involvement, but rather the dedication and awareness of the school systems in serving this special student population.

STUDENTS

Because schools maintain their own policies* about how many students can belong to their Academic Bowl teams (the Bowl has no policy on this point, other than only four students may represent their school at any one time), the April study was able to identify a population of 220. Of that number, 88 are Seniors anticipating graduation this year, 64 are Juniors, and 64 are Sophomores. Four students were identified as Freshmen. Their grades (GPA) ranged from a low of 2.85 to 4.00 on a 4-point scale. The average grade of the total students was 3.39.

*While most schools will allow as many students to become involved as they think will help the team, others have developed elaborate farm team systems which feed into the Academic Bowl team which plays at Oklahoma State.

While all schools allowed any student to "try-out" for the Academic Bowl, responses indicated that the students who are placed on the team have: 1) good grades from college-prep classes, 2) are strongly motivated, and 3) recognized by the academic interest of the College Bowl graduates once they chose their colleges.

TABLE FOUR
CHOICE OF MAJORS OF ACADEMIC BOWL GRADUATING SENIORS*

Humanities	13
Engineering	22
Social Sciences	08
The Arts	04
Education	04
Medicine	06
Others (Law, etc.)	18

*Total will not add to 220.

Of the graduates identified, the data indicated that 61 percent (30 students) left Oklahoma to attend college. Of those that remained in the state, 42 percent (8 students) chose Oklahoma State University.

TABLE FIVE
CHOICE OF COLLEGE OF ACADEMIC BOWL GRADUATING SENIORS

Local Junior College	01
Local Region University	03
University of Oklahoma	07
Oklahoma State University	08
Out of state	30*

*Included are: University of Texas-Austin, Notre Dame, Rice, Air Force, Harvard, Baylor, William and Mary, St. Johns, Duke, Westminister, Boston, Stanford, Southern Methodist University, MIT, Annapolis, other prestigious small colleges.